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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000077

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DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY

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SUBJECT: NIGERIAN INSIDERS EXPLAIN RIBADU'S REMOVAL FROM
EFCC

REF: ABUJA 02627

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter Pflaumer for reasons 1.4. (b
& d).

1.(C) SUMMARY: Embassy officers have discussed the reassignment of EFCC Chairman Ribadu with senior political figures and Ribadu's Chief of Staff. All acknowledge it was not a routine rotation and was handled regrettably and clumsily. Politicos point to Yar'Adua's uncertainty about Ribadu's objectivity, and unhappiness with lack of progress in cases against Obasanjo and his associates. Both sides agree the Ibori arrest was a catalyst for Ribadu's removal albeit for different reasons. EFCC Chief of Staff Olorunyomi fears for Ribadu's safety and blames his removal on the Attorney General and Inspector General of Police, both of whom are under investigation and, he claims, influenced by Ibori. Notably, all expressed confidence in Yar'Adua's commitment to the continued fight against corruption. END SUMMARY.

2.(C) Pius Anyim (strictly protect) former Senate President and candidate for Chairman of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) told PolOff in a private meeting January 5 that Ribadu was removed from his position because he was considered to be too close to former President Obasanjo, and perhaps still beholden to him. Anyim hinted that the Presidency and others were dissatisfied with the slow pace of the corruption investigation against Obasanjo and felt Ribadu may have been subtly stalling the inquiry, if not outright protecting Obasanjo and his associates. An aide to President Yar'Adua at the Presidential Villa independently corroborated this viewpoint to a member of the embassy staff.

3.(C) Anyim contends that Obasanjo instructed Ribadu to "take down" James Ibori, as the two, who were largely presumed to be responsible for ensuring Yar'Adua's succession, had had a falling out. Anyim did not question Ibori's guilt, but suggested that Yar'Adua's uncertainty about Obasanjo's ability to exercise influence over Ribadu, whom Obasanjo originally appointed, was of great concern. He also asserted that Yar'Adua did not feel indebted to Ibori for any help in getting elected.

4.(C) Anyim insisted President Yar'Adua was committed to reform and the anti-corruption campaign, and planned to bring in a tough-minded neutral outsider to head the EFCC)- somebody who was not considered to have any ties to, nor prior relationship with, Obasanjo, and who would therefore be

more proactive and even-handed in investigating and prosecuting all corrupt public officials -- even the former President. Anyim also characterized the possible merger of the ICPC, EFCC and Code of Conduct Bureau as having been a potential means by which to remove Ribadu, and doubted that any consolidation would move forward under a new EFCC Chairman.

5.(C) In a January 9 meeting, Chairman Ribadu's Chief of Staff Dapo Olorunyomi (strictly protect) expressed to PolOff and INL Off his belief that recently arrested former Delta State Governor James Ibori had convinced Attorney General Michael Aondoakaa and the Inspector General of Police Mike Okiro to reassign Ribadu. (Note: Per reftel, both of these individuals have open cases against them at the EFCC.) Olorunyomi also said he felt that President Yar'Adua was indeed genuinely committed to the battle against corruption, and was confident of the level of dedication and determination of others at the EFCC to carry on without Ribadu. He felt the public would not tolerate anything less.

6.(C) Alarminglly, however, Olorunyomi shared his fear that if Ribadu goes on study leave and his security detail is reduced to a single bodyguard, he will be assassinated. "James Ibori and Andy Uba are killers, and would love the opportunity to get to Nuhu (Ribadu)," he said. The following day Olorunyomi released to the press a detailed rebuttal of corruption allegations aimed at Ribadu himself, particularly in regard to the Chairman's supposed acquisition of valuable real estate assets in both Abuja and Dubai.

7.(C) In an impromptu meeting at the Embassy consular section January 10, Speaker of the House of Representatives Dimedji

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Bankole (strictly protect) told Embassy Officers the whole Ribadu affair was about loyalty, hinting that there were valid questions about Ribadu's ties to Obasanjo and the lack of progress on cases involving the former president and his associates. Bankole privately faulted Ribadu for making the anticorruption campaign about himself, and not focusing more on the EFCC as an institution, commenting "There is no success without succession." Bankole also said he felt Ribadu had made a mistake by not demonstrating more of a break (he did not specify publicly or privately) with the previous Administration at the start of the Yar'Adua era. Bankole implored for "breathing room" for his and other reformers' efforts at transforming the politics and economics of Nigeria. Bankole expressed his hope that no hasty measures will be taken by the international community as a result of Ribadu's transfer.

8.(C) COMMENT: The dust has not yet settled on the Ribadu issue. All these explanations for Ribadu's transfer seem plausible and were offered by credible individuals with some inside knowledge of what transpired. We should, in any case, focus on what the EFCC does to fight corruption. End comment. PIASCIK